

VZCZCXRO4811
RR RUEHDBU RUEHPW RUEHSL
DE RUEHBUL #1574/01 1710819
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 200819Z JUN 09
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9575
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 KABUL 001574

DEPARTMENT FOR SRAP, SCA/FO, SCA/A, EUR/RPM
STATE PASS TO AID FOR ASIA/SCAA
USFOR-A FOR POLAD

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PHUM PGOV AF

SUBJECT: Jowzjan Province: Worsening Security; Mixed Reviews on Governance; Water, Energy Projects Underway

Summary

¶1. Over the past six months, deteriorating security has been the most significant change in Jowzjan province. Insurgents have demonstrated their ability to launch attacks both in remote districts of the province as well as along the ring road from Sheberghan to Mazar-e-Sharif. While the insurgency in Jowzjan and neighboring provinces is not on the same scale as in other parts of the country, it is growing, and neither ISAF nor ANSF-led operations have put a dent in it. This has strained relations between provincial officials and the PRT in Mazar-e Sharif, which covers the region. Governor Zare is an able administrator but draws mixed reviews from the provincial council, whose members want to be consulted by the governor more frequently. The USAID-funded testing of the Sheberghan natural gas fields is underway. This project hopes to attract much needed private sector investment in construction of a power plant that would reduce Afghanistan's dependence on imported electricity.

Security

¶2. The security situation in Jowzjan has been worsening in areas bordering the insecure districts of Faryab, Sar-e-pul and Balkh provinces. While the insurgency in those areas is not as widespread as it is in other parts of the country, it is growing, and is not confined to Pashtun pockets of the north. Worse, neither ISAF nor ANSF clearing operations have resulted in any kills or captures of insurgent leaders there. Insurgents hiding in the lawless Dasht-e-Laili desert area between Faryab, Jowzjan, and Sar-e-pul provinces illegally tax residents of border villages with increasing frequency and impunity. The Afghan National Police (ANP) are undermanned and outgunned throughout the province. Nowhere was this more evident than in Qush Teppeh district, where a brazen March 2009 insurgent ambush claimed the lives of 11 GIRoA officials, including the district governor and district chief of police. Reports from the Norwegian PRT in Faryab point to cooperation between Taliban and radical Uzbek militants in Faryab with ties to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. The police chief believes that these groups were behind the attack on Qush Teppeh authorities.

¶3. The Jowzjan provincial council chairman has been very critical of the government's failure to respond swiftly to the attack on the Qush Teppeh officials, and told State PRT officer that he had received several calls from alarmed district residents who were clamoring for a strong response from the provincial government, especially when insurgents began collecting illegal taxes from them. The chairman fears that some of those residents may have turned their backs on government. Both he and the provincial governor advocate vetting and arming a select group of villagers to repel insurgent advances in Qush Teppeh and neighboring Darzab district, where insurgents, believed to number between 30 to 60 men, have effectively seized control of 15 villages. The Darzab district administrator and his police force of 18 men are afraid to venture to some villages only a few kilometers from the district center.

¶ 14. The Qush Teppeh incident also exposed glaring deficiencies in how information about the incident was shared among Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). When the German military liaison officer from ISAF's Regional Command North arrived at the ANSF Regional Operations Coordination Center (OCCR) nearly ten hours after the attack, he found only one ANP training officer on duty, who still did not have a grasp on what had actually happened in Qush Teppeh. It took another hour to determine how many GIRoA officials had been killed and wounded.

¶ 15. Despite resistance by German leadership of Regional Command North to supporting an Afghan National Army (ANA) operation without Afghan commando units, the Swedish PRT planned and executed Operation Shaheen with the ANSF, involving over 900 men, in the Qush Teppeh border areas. The provincial governor and chief of police have roundly criticized the PRT for the ineffectiveness of the operation, which failed to capture Mullah Nadir, the main leader of the insurgency, or any of his subordinates. Governor Zare told State PRT officer that he no longer has confidence in ISAF. A telling sign of this loss of confidence is Zare's refusal to invite the PRT to a regional security meeting in early June to plan a joint ANP-NDS operation to capture Nadir. According to Governor Zare, the Afghan army northern region commander has promised to send ANA units to the area, but for now, those units are involved in an ongoing operation in Ghormach district of Faryab.

¶ 16. Qush Teppeh and Darzab are only the latest problem areas in Jowzjan. An ambush of the Feizabad district governor's convoy on the ring road last fall left one teacher dead and the district administrator seriously wounded. PRT units have had a few close calls with IEDs intended for them along the ring road. The Jowzjan police chief believes the perpetrators of these attacks are given

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safe passage in the neighboring insecure Balkh districts of Charbolak and Chemtal. Police have recovered night notes warning people not to cooperate with ISAF, and there has been anti-ISAF preaching in local mosques in Aqcha, Feizabad, and Murdian districts. The compound of a faith-based NGO in Acqha came under rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) fire last fall. Female Turkish teachers at a girls' school in Aqcha also narrowly escaped harm when their apartment residences came under RPG attack a few weeks later. In these districts, many residents have lost confidence in the police's ability to protect them and in the courts' ability to keep prisoners in jail. That said, some are still willing to take risks to assist the ANP. Residents of Shisha Kana village in Feizabad district assisted police by detaining four insurgents on motorbikes following an attack that claimed the life of an ANP colonel on the ring road.

¶ 17. Khwajeh do Koh district, which abuts the ring road, is the only Jowzjan district whose police have undergone Focused District Development (FDD) training. U.S. police mentors report that feedback from communities in this relatively calm district toward the newly trained Afghan police is positive. But no other Jowzjan districts are scheduled to undergo FDD training for the next few years. Germany will not commit to doing FDD in Jowzjan and wants Sweden and Finland to share the burden of FDD training there. That is unlikely to happen as both countries help fund the European Union police (EUPOL) force in Afghanistan, which works at the provincial - not district - level.

¶ 18. Complicating the ANP's efforts to respond to security challenges is the recent order of the Ministry of Interior for each of the provinces in the north to send 100 police officers to Kabul. The Jowzjan police chief, frustrated by this order, said he will only send new recruits to Kabul, not experienced ANP soldiers. The reduction in police manpower raises doubts that even if ANP forces from all Jowzjan districts were to undergo FDD training, they would still number too few to significantly improve security in troublesome areas. For example, the Aqcha district chief of police remarked that he has only ten men to patrol his district. Expanding the ANP forces in the districts and putting them through FDD stands as a long term goal.

¶ 19. The Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) process has

stalled in Jowzjan, largely due to the refusal of former HiG commander Mallawi Ebadi in Khaneqa district to turn in the weapons cache he is widely believed to be concealing. Other former commanders view the DIAG process skeptically, and are waiting to see how Afghan authorities deal with Ebadi before deciding whether to comply with DIAG. Ebadi, for his part, has denied that he still has weapons but has also contradicted himself by reportedly saying that he will hand over his weapons only after deputy provincial governor Faquir, a former protege of General Dostum, hands over his.

Governance

¶10. Governor Hashim Zare is an educated, respected administrator, but his performance as governor has drawn mixed reviews from his own deputy, the provincial council, and apparently from the Independent Directorate for Local Governance. He has deftly balanced relationships between local Arab and Junbesh Party factions and has even allowed Balkh Governor Atta's Jamiat Party to open an office in Sheberghan without any incident despite the predominance of the Junbesh Party in the province. But his tenure as governor has coincided with a worsening security situation in the province. Deputy Governor Faquir - a relative of Zare's - has termed Zare "weak" in his handling of security matters. Zare is not known for getting out and about the province, preferring to deploy his deputy and other officials to resolve problems. His government's month-long delay in responding with a show of force to Qush Teppeh attack fueled the impression among residents that the government is unresponsive at best and impotent at worst.

¶11. Governor Zare and his deputy governor Faquir have cleared the air since Zare arranged for the rotation of five district administrators in Jowzjan without consulting Faquir. Communication between the two has improved since then, and Faquir is now brought in on important decisions.

¶12. Jowzjan province remains Junbesh Party country and the composition of the provincial council reflects that. The provincial council chairman is a strong leader but he is frustrated that the governor does not consult regularly with the council. Due to the overburdened and often mistrusted formal justice system, council members routinely find themselves settling disputes among provincial residents. Some provincial council members accuse the attorney general of corruption and blame the governor for protecting him.

¶13. Good governance is lacking at the district level. District governors in the ethnic Turkmen districts of Khamiab and Qarqin,

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which share a border with Turkmenistan, are reportedly involved in drug smuggling rings linked to Kabul-based government ministers. The district administrator of Khaneqa district - a former HiG member - is under the influence of former HiG commander Mallawi Ebadi. One bright spot is the Darzab district administrator. A progressive, activist administrator, he has called local National Solidarity Program (NSP) representatives out on the carpet for allowing and perpetrating corruption with NSP funds.

¶14. A sex scandal inside the Sheberghan female prison, which had been doubling as a brothel, prompted an investigation that resulted in the dismissal of the Jowzjan prisons chief, but only after UNAMA pushed for a strong response from the Kabul prisons directorate. Finland has decided to pull the plug on construction of a \$1 million euro male prison in Sheberghan in the wake of the scandal. It will redirect this money to build police stations in Samangan province.

Development

¶15. (U) Jowzjan's biggest development need is potable water. Through two small community-based grants to a community in Murdian district, USAID has helped address this need by funding construction of two water reservoirs near schools. Approximately 6,320 families in the district now have reliable and safe access to clean drinking water. Additionally, USAID's Local Governance Community Development (LGCD) Program completed work on the largest water reservoir project in Jowzjan that will support four communities in the Mingajik District. The water reservoir will hold 1,485 cubic

meters of water and approximately 10,000 people will have access to clean potable water. Governor Zare won support from President Karzai for a \$50 million potable water distribution pipe scheme, but that approval arrived without any funding from Kabul.

¶16. USAID-funded testing of the Yatimtaq and Gerquduq natural gas fields in Jowzjan began in April 2009. After determining the amount of reserves, USAID will issue a tender for private investment in the fields. It is believed that enough natural gas reserves exist to fuel a power plant that could feed into the main electric grid, thus reducing or even eliminating Afghanistan's dependence on imported electricity from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

¶17. Jowzjan province received \$1 million in Good Performers Initiative money last year for maintaining poppy-free status. The province is expected to be declared poppy-free again this year.

¶18. The potential for conflict over grazing lands remains high between Uzbek residents of Khwajeh do Koh district and Kuchi nomads.

The Kuchis have lived in the district for over twenty years but have not been given district residency cards because they are originally from Faryab province. Kuchis are growing in number in the district but without residency cards, they have been ineligible to receive benefits such as development projects through the government's National Solidarity Program. The provincial government has not found a way to address this inequality yet.

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